

The Marine Corps College of Continuing Education (CCE) has begun transforming its officer distance education programs (DEPs) in order to better prepare students for the challenges posed by the complex and changing nature of warfighting in today's global environment. This transformation strategy, dubbed the "Son of Seminar" (SoS) initiative, builds on the success of the current voluntary seminar program established in 1997 by ensuring that all students have greater accessibility to the Marine Corps University (MCU) and its Command and Staff College (CSC) and Expeditionary Warfare School (EWS) resident schools' curricula through the CCE and its faculty-led distance education seminars offered around the globe. The SoS signals a shift away from the current officer DEP baseline—a traditional correspondence course shipped to the student for self-completion—to seminar-based programs designed to more closely parallel the learning experience of students in our resident schoolhouses.

The seminar-focused SoS initiative seeks to incorporate and integrate proven adult learning methodologies, currently available technologies, and closer collaboration between the resident schoolhouses and the associated DEPs in order to shape course and faculty development, encourage student participation, and measure student comprehension. The SoS initiative also will introduce new seminar learning enhancements—practical exercises, short writing assignments, seminar discussions, and student presentations—that reinforce educational objectives while encouraging students to apply creative and critical thinking skills. As a result, students will benefit from greater interaction with fellow students and adjunct faculty and receive immediate feedback on their academic performance.

Background and Rationale for Change

To better understand the transformation to SoS, an overview of the CCE's origins and mission is useful. The CCE was established in 1997 as the Marine Corps advocate for officer distance professional military education (DPME), responsible for develop-

Transforming Officer Distance Professional Military Education

New initiative supports the growth of distance learning programs for Marines.

by Col Terrence K. Kerrigan, USMC(Ret) & James I. Van Zummeren

ment of officer DPME programs for the 80 percent of active duty and Reserve majors and captains who do not attend the resident program. The CCE's initial mission was twofold. First, it was tasked with redesigning the CSCDEP courseware (known as the 8700 series) to the current 8800 series. Second, it was tasked with implementing a voluntary seminar option that would enrich the student's educational

(AY03–04), CSCDEP seminar students comprised 12 percent of all enrolled CSCDEP students but accounted for an impressive 92 percent of all 2004 CSCDEP graduates. Clearly, the discipline required of students for seminar participation, combined with an effective courseware product, enhanced the learning experience and contributed to increased graduation rates.

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experience and improve student graduation percentages. The 8800 series incorporated a teacher-focused design to be delivered using the traditional independent guided study (IGS) "box of books" curriculum with the voluntary seminar option as an enhancement.

The 8800 series received immediate positive feedback from many students on the revised courseware, and for those who chose to attend the voluntary adjunct faculty-led seminar, it became clear that those students thrived in a structured seminar environment where they could share information and operational experiences, gain insights into complex topics, and demonstrate mastery of course learning objectives. Dramatically increased graduation rates attested to the effectiveness of the seminar option. During academic year 2003–04

Accreditation Issues

Despite positive results, the voluntary nature of the seminar program has limited its potential because attendance remains unpredictable and not universal. Participatory activities, such as group practical exercises, cannot be scheduled with any guarantee of student participation. This uncertainty also has created limitations on what assessments can be used to measure student learning. Students currently complete objective-based, multiple-choice examinations. This singular method of measuring student learning has repeatedly been cited as insufficient for meeting learning standards established by the *Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 1800.01C, Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP)*.

Members of the Joint Staff and the Service Command and Staff Col-

USMC College of Continuing Education

Satellite Campus Sites/Regional Coordinators



Figure 1. Regional coordinators for CCE.

leges visit each Service college every 5 years to conduct a process of accreditation for joint education (PAJE) evaluation to validate college compliance with the OPMEP. In March 2004 the CCE was reaffirmed as a Joint Phase I college and received many useful recommendations from the PAJE team on how to continue to improve its joint PME (JPME) program. In fact, it was recommendations from the PAJE team that spawned the idea for the SoS initiative. Specifically, the PAJE team was complimentary regarding the voluntary seminar option and recommended that CCE expand the program to include both increased accessibility by all students and the employment of multiple, varied learning assessments—such as writing, speaking, and demonstrating knowledge—that would encourage students to develop their creative and critical thinking skills.

Under the direction of the Commanding General, Training and Education Command and the President, MCU, and through collaboration with the resident schoolhouses, the CCE developed the SoS program that seeks to build on the successes in our DEPs since 1997, with improved curriculum and assessments and *universal* accessibility to adjunct faculty-led seminars.

Program Shift: Where Are We Headed?

The new seminar program will kick off during AY07-08 with weekly seminars commencing in October 2007. Like its current voluntary seminar predecessor, the new SoS programs are designed for students to graduate in 2 years, satisfying both the Marine Corps' criteria for "PME complete" by grade prior to coming into zone for promotion and the JPME criteria for Phase I JPME for

graduates of the CSCDEP. The 70-week, 2-year seminar construct will closely mirror resident school educational learning objectives and utilize similar assessments to measure student mastery of course learning outcomes. The MCU released the revised Marine Corps order on PME in January, which included the criteria for PME complete by grade.

The shift from the current IGS DEP, where the Marine Corps Institute (MCI) enrolls and delivers materials to the students, to the new SoS seminar program administered entirely by the CCE will occur on 1 July 2007. Students enrolling on or after 1 July 2007 will be enrolled in the SoS seminar program via one of the CCE regional coordinators. (See Figure 1.) Students currently enrolled in or those who plan to enroll via MCI in the current IGS programs for CSC and EWS by 31 May 2007 will be offered two options:

Enrollment Criteria for CSCDEP and EWSDEP in Priority Order

CSCDEP

1. All Marine Corps field grade officers.
2. Marine Corps captains and CWO3/4/5 who've completed EWSDEP.
3. Sister Service and international field grade officers; government civilians GS-13 and above, if space is available.
4. Marine E-8s and above, if space is available.

EWSDEP

1. All Marine Corps captains, first lieutenants, CWO2/3.
2. Marine Corps majors who haven't enrolled in or completed CSCDEP.
3. Sister Service, international officers, and government civilians of equivalent grades of captain, first lieutenant, CWO3, CWO2, GS-12, and GS-13, if space is available.
4. Marine E-7s who've completed all EPME requirements, if space is available.

Officers in the grade of colonel (O-6) and lieutenant colonel (O-5) are not eligible to enroll in EWSDEP without a waiver from MCU.

Figure 2.

- Continue in their present IGS program until completion or the 31 May 2010 termination date of the IGS program.
 - Request transition from the IGS program to the SoS seminar program via a regional coordinator.
- Additional information will be provided by Marine administrative message this fall.

What's Changed and What Hasn't?

The most salient change associated with the program shift will be the termination of the traditional MCI correspondence course as the baseline for the Marine Corps' officer DEPs. The SoS seminar-based programs will become the new baseline for *all* Marine Corps officer distance education students. This shift ensures that all students who enroll in officer DEPs will be connected to the MCU via the CCE, their local regional coordinator, and adjunct faculty from enrollment to graduation.

For past and current DEP students who've opted to attend voluntary seminars since 1998, this shift will likely be transparent and evolutionary, not revolutionary. The SoS initiative will continue to promote adjunct faculty-led onsite seminars as the closest method to replicating the learning experiences of resident schoolhouses. Seminars will continue to be led by qualified adjunct faculty who are active or retired Marines, officers from other Services, and selected civilian scholars.

The primary duties of the adjunct faculty will be to guide seminar discussions, share their education and experience, and evaluate students in a manner similar to that used by the resident faculty. The CCE also conducts seminars by video teleconferencing capability in order to link up geographically isolated pockets of students—who otherwise could not participate—with onsite students and adjunct faculty.

For past seminar students, the most significant changes will be updated curriculum, including the infusion of interactive multimedia and other technologies to better meet varied student learning styles; the incorporation of a variety of means of assessing student mastery of the educational objectives and ability to think critically; and the addition of online virtual seminars that link faculty and students deployed or assigned *around the globe*.

In order to meet the anticipated increase in student throughput in seminars, the CCE will both increase the number of adjunct faculty and encourage officers to enroll in the DPME programs as early in their eligibility period as possible consistent with their other professional and personal obligations. Figure 2 provides the eligibility for enrollment for the SoS EWSDEP and CSCDEP commencing 1 July 2007. Regional coordinators will work with all prospective students to find a seminar delivery method that best suits

the students' particular needs/geographic locations.

Final Thoughts

The SoS initiative is the impetus for transforming the officer DEPs and ensuring that all officers are afforded the opportunities to complete their PME/JPME with a rich learning experience more closely derived from and parallel to the resident curriculum and seminar delivery construct. As current operational tempo has placed extraordinary demands on our officers, we continue to be challenged to provide them with the quality PME/JPME necessary for future operational assignments in a dynamic and increasingly complex global environment. The Commandant of the Marine Corps and other senior leaders have repeatedly stressed that the unusual demands placed on our Marines, and especially our Marine leaders, provides the imperative for raising the bar and providing the very best and most accessible PME possible to all Marines.

US  MC

>Col Kerrigan is the Director, CCE. He was the Professor of Strategy and War, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, before assuming his current duties in July 2002.

>>A retired Marine, Van Zummeren is the Dean of Academics, CCE. He received his doctorate from George Mason University. Prior to assuming his current duties in May 2001, he was the Deputy Director, Marine Corps War College.